"To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad."

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FOR THE LAND'S SAKE

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Once upon a time, long, long ago, there lived a man--leader, statesman, prophet--who throughout his life had labored for the achievement of a great ideal. Now, at the point where the promise of fulfillment of these efforts of a lifetime was at hand, there came to him a voice which said that the end of his days must come without the realization of his dreams. But this man was given the privilege of seeing the tangible evidence of the ideal which he had pursued. From the top of a mountain, which was to be the place of his death, he was permitted to see far off the promised land which had been the goal of his efforts on behalf of his people throughout the years of a long and useful life.

The man who by his vision and labors sought to lead the people of his day into a land of promise, a land glowingly described as one "flowing with milk and honey," was Moses, and the voice that spoke to him was the voice of God.

It is a strange and yet understandable testimony of history that the great dreamers and mystics who have given to the world some of its noblest ideals have lived on the fringes of desert spaces. Much of the history of mankind and much of the wreakage of civilization which history presents to our view may be attributed to that apparent incapacity of man to associate the idealism that appears to flourish in an environment characterized by meagerness of resources with the habits of mind and activities which dominate the life of peoples whose natural environment is rich in resources of climate, soil and minerals.

We can find in the history of our own country the same struggle to associate the idealism of our poets, leaders and statesmen with the practical conduct of our affairs as a people and a nation. America has often been called "the promised land." We have, however, failed to realize that if America is to be preserved as "the promised land," we must project our social and economic philosophy beyond the thought that the goal has been achieved when the land has been possessed. This people, like that ancient people led by Moses, must face the issue as to what is to be done with the land in order that its beauties may be preserved, its richness enhanced, and its opportunites multiplied. The alternative which we must face is the same as that presented to the ancient civilizations which have preceded us. Whether it is the civilization of Palestine, of Greece, or of Rome, underlying all the superficial facts of their rise and decline is the use which they made of the land resources upon which these and all civilizations must ultimately rest. The record of man's use of land throughout history is a record of abuse, and the teaching of history is that a people which ruins its underlying natural resources writes its own death sentence.

In facing the facts of our own history, we are not, therefore, dealing with an academic or theoretical issue when we recognize that the vast resources in lands, timber, and minerals, with which we were originally endowed, are the basic

heritage of this people as a nation, and that provision for the conservation of these resources through economical utilization of them is a sacred duty and responsibility of government.

The need for a clear recognition and acceptance of this duty and responsibility grows with each passing year. The major facts in the history of the settlement of this country are known. The period of the frontier gave to the American people broadly two heritages. The life of the pioneer in the first place naturally placed a premium upon the exercise of individual initiative and self-reliance, which in some of its manifestations tends to discount the importance attaching to the adaptation of individuals to the conditions which make for wholesome life for the community or nation as a whole. This spiritual heritage is both an asset and a liability. It has given us vigor and enterprise as a people, while at the same time interposing barriers to those adjustments so essential to a complex civilization, although relatively unimportant in earlier stages of economic and social development.

In addition to this spiritual heritage, we have also a physical heritage in our natural resources in lands, mines, and forests. Before undertaking physical adjustments, we must, I think, consider those spiritual adjustments which are essential to our task. We must adjust our ideals to our needs; recognize that our physical resources must be conserved, must be properly utilized, if the civilization which our forefathers labored to establish is to be preserved.

The physical adjustments needed are not easy to make. Under the influence of broad forces operating in our national life, entire towns in many of the New England States have been almost completely depopulated. Throughout the northern and southern Appalachians thousands of families detached themselves from the main stream of western migration to settle in the isolated valleys and along the slopes and ridges of the mountains. Many of these families have now become stranded, unable to readjust their lives to new conditions and opportunities.

In the Piedmont region of the Southeast, the plantation system, characteristic of an earlier period, has broken down. Long years of cropping, accompanied by progressive erosion of the soil, have ruined much of the land and undermined the foundations of economic life.

In the Lake States, particularly in the northern portion of these States, the timber has been skinned off the land and extensive settlement has been encouraged in areas with soils too poor to support an adequate institutional basis of social life. In the Great Plains area, under the influence of temporary periods of good rainfall and of high prices, lands which should never have been turned to crop production have been broken by the plow, thus destroying the original sod and diverting these lands from their proper use for grazing.

The consequences of these and like maladjustments in land-use, characteristic in one form or another of every part of the country, have had effects which tend to be cumulative. Adjustments made for the land's sake are in the last analysis adjustments in the interests both of the people occupying the poor land and of the whole population group. Misuse of land results in the ruin both of the land and of the people. To save the land is to save the people.

How does misuse of land affect families residing on such land? Their incomes frequently are too low to meet adequately their elementary needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Natural characteristics of the land, such as poor soil, rough or steep topography, and inadequate rainfall, impose upon these families an impossible task. Many of them have spent a lifetime in a battle against these adversities of nature, seeking to wrest a livelihood from impoverished land. Their efforts have led inevitably to frustration and defeat.

These situations provide many instances in which the stamina of the population group has been progressively undermined by inadequacies of food, sanitation and hygiene. There are instances, also, of inbreeding which has resulted in biological degeneration of the stock. The records leave no room for doubt as to the serious consequences of maladjustments in the use of land upon the population occupying the land.

Misuse of land, at the same time that it undermines or destroys the stamina and virility of the people living upon the land, destroys their basic resource in the land itself. Attempts to cultivate steep hillsides result in rapid erosion, quickly unfitting the land for any use whatever. Tons of soil, a priceless heritage requiring untold ages to accumulate, are annually washed from the hillsides and slopes of farms. "A careful estimate," says the National Resources Board in its recent report (page 15), "indicates that on our crop and pasture land there is an average annual loss of 322,000,000 tons of organic matter, and a net loss of 222,000,000 tons. Over half of this is due to leaching or erosion. It is estimated that usefulness for farming of 35,000,000 acres has been completely destroyed, that the top soil has been nearly or quite removed from an additional 125,000,000 acres, and that another 100,000,000 acres are starting in that direction."

Breaking of the original sod has exposed millions of acres of our western grasslands, originally a productive asset, to the agencies of destruction. The protection afforded by the grass cover having been removed, the winds now sweeping across these vast plains annually carry off millions of tons of the top soil of these areas, thus rapidly reducing these vast grazing resources to the sterility of a desert. Attempts to use the land for the production of cultivated crops have failed and are doomed to fail.

This is serious enough in its effects on the lives of the people involved, but more serious still is the rapid destruction of the basic productive capacity of the land, resulting from its misuse. Perhaps the bitterness of economic defeat confronting the families involved may be repaired, but the tragedy of destruction, if it long continues, will reduce these lands to a state of sterility which will require generations to repair.

In May 1934 Washington and other eastern cities were blanketed by a dust storm which spread over half of the United States. This storm brought to us visible evidence of the destructive effects of wind erosion on vast areas of our unprotected soils. It is estimated that within that portion of the United States lying west of the Mississippi, storm winds annually transport 850,000,000 tons of soil a distance of 1,440 miles. In the same portion of the United States, according to the same estimate, the winds carry solid material ranging in amount from 126,000 to 160,000 tons per cubic mile of air. The density of such storms is illustrated by the facetious story that in the State of Kansas during one of these dust storms, prairie dogs were observed to be digging holes sixty feet above the ground.

We see, therefore, that adjustments in the use of land are vital to the protection of the land itself and of the people occupying the land. It is important, however, to recognize that the benefits of such adjustments accrue not only to the people occupying the poor land but also to the communities occupying the better lands adjacent to these poor areas. Within these poor areas a large proportion of the land is typically delinquent for taxes. At the same time, roads, schools, and other public facilities and services supported by the general community must be maintained for the benefit of the isolated families and groups occupying these poor lands. With extensive tax-delinquency applying to the poor areas, a pyramiding of taxes upon the better lands is inevitable. This pyramiding of taxes tends, of course, to cause the better lands to become tax-delinquent, thus spreading to the entire community the infection originating in the misuse of land.

Many communities in the United States are disabusing themselves of the idea that the best method of maintaining a permanent source of public revenue is to keep lands in private ownership and on the tax roll, regardless of the use to which these lands are devoted. They have found that such a policy ultimately results in the creation of situations such as we have described. Far from establishing a source of permanent public revenue, such policies have had the effect of undermining the very foundations upon which the support of public institutions and agencies must rest. It is sometimes argued that to remove these misused lands from the tax roll by converting them, for example, from private to public ownership would have the effect of undermining the source of local governmental revenue. It must be obvious to all, however, that if shifts in the ownership and use of such lands are accompanied by adequate provisions for the establishment of the families involved in better locations, the effect would be not only to improve the economic opportunities of these families, thus creating a capacity for the payment of taxes where none existed before, but also to reduce the per capita costs of supporting schools, maintaining roads, affording fire protection, and similar services which every governmental agency must provide for its citizens, however remote their homes may be. Misuse of land is commonly associated with isolation of families and population groups, and in these situations the per capita costs of maintaining public services are always high, although the services which the community ordinarily is able to provide for such groups usually fall far short of those that are available to the less isolated portions of the population.

In the face of this situation, briefly and inadequately described, can there remain any doubt as to our need for a program of land-use adjustment, sound in its objectives, national in its scope, permanent in its administration, local in its application? During the past thirty years much has been written and spoken in this country on the subject of conservation and much of real accomplishment has resulted from these discussions. But our programs have been fragmentary and incomplete, our policies uncorrelated and inadequate.

Among the major achievements of the New Deal, in my opinion, is the foundation which has been laid for a permanent land-utilization policy and land-use adjustment program. The foundations of such a policy have been established through a comprehensive survey of our land resources and land-use adjustment problems made under the direction of the National Resources Board. Supplementing the work of the National Resources Board, a program of land-use adjustment has been initiated. This program, national in scope, has been properly launched on a purely experimental and demonstration basis, in order that progress might be measured, results tested, and adjustments in methods and objectives made in the light of practical experience.

Under this program, the Government is in process of acquiring poor land now predominantly in agricultural use, with a view to converting that land to the use or uses for which it is better adapted. The program gives practical recognition to the fact that our original physical resources have seriously deteriorated under a system which permits abuse of the land and impoverishment of families and communities.

The major objectives of the program include: (1) Conversion of farm land to other uses with the primary objective of eliminating or reducing agricultural production on poor land at a minimum cost; (2) protection and utilization of lands to retard or prevent erosion and to restore the physical productivity of the soil; (3) improvement of the economic and social conditions of families now occupying the lands acquired; (4) improvement of the economic and social condition of "industrially-stranded population groups" occupying essentially rural areas, including readjustment and rehabilitation of Indian population by the

acquisition of lands to enable them to make appropriate and constructively planned use of combined land areas in units suited to their needs; (5) reduction of the costs of local governments and of local public institutions and services, while at the same time establishing a more permanent basis of public revenues for local governments by improving the economic situations of families occupying lands subject to the local jurisdiction; (6) encouragement of the planned use of rural lands by setting up experimental projects to serve as repeatable demonstrations of types of adjustments applicable to various regions in the United States.

We must recognize, I think, that these immediate and special objectives of the Government's land-acquisition program are of little import to the future of American life unless the broader implications of the program are clearly recognized.

In the field of land-use planning, the program of the Federal Government for the purchase and use of submarginal land provides only a preliminary and experimental approach to the solution of a special phase of the general problem of land conservation and use. Specifically, the present program applies to those adjustments which may be effected or facilitated through Federal acquisition of land. In addressing ourselves to the solution of these problems, we should, I think, have courage to accept the risks of experimentation which are involved. No program sufficiently comprehensive and potentially competent to meet the problems involved can fail to have its hazards, but the hazards of the program must be faced, unless we are willing to accept the consequences of continued neglect of our land problems. These consequences are no longer of a type requiring exercise of the imagination to visualize. In physical terms, they are presented to us by the spectacle of denuded hillsides, eroded and barren fields, and a wilderness of stumps on lands once covered by the magnificent vistas of our great forests. In economic and social terms, we see these consequences manifested in impoverished families, decadent communities, a mounting burden of public relief, leading in some cases to a breakdown of the entire institutional basis of community life.

To mend this broken fabric of our economic and social life and to regenerate the underlying resources upon which that life depends is a complex and difficult task, but the urgencies of the situation demand that it be undertaken. To embark on such a program requires, however, that we throw into the discard our notion that these conditions will right themselves if only left alone. We must believe, also, that assistance can be given to the families involved which will provide them with improved opportunities, give to their children a brighter future, transform the lives of these men, women and children from a social and economic liability into an asset to their community, their state, and their nation.

We may feel inspired to risk the experimentation implicit in this task and to challenge the hazards of these new frontiers in the assurance that by so doing we are following in the path of the pioneers who effected the physical conquest of the country and made of us a nation. That path is no longer fraught with the privations and hardships which were the lot of the old pioneer. The obstacles to be encountered by the new pioneer are spiritual rather than physical. The new pioneer must bring to his task the high courage which has made of the frontier man and woman figures of heroism in the sagas of the old frontier. The beauties of that land which they settled and welded into a nation are celebrated in song and story. Those early settlers of New England could, indeed, say: "We love thy rocks and rills, thy woods and templed hills." And those pioneers who left the eastern seaboard to populate the vast reaches of prairie and plain to the west built their homes in a land more beautiful than that which Moses, looking down from Nebo, beheld in ages gone.

"O beautiful for spacious skies,
"For amber waves of grain -
"For purple mountain majesties,
"Above the fruited plain."

Let it be our task to repair the damage to our lands, our forests, and our streams, to improve and conserve these as a heritage for our children and our children's children. Looking upon the majesty of this vast resource, may they still find in it the primary foundation of human happiness, peace, and contentment which a fertile land provides. May they find that our labors for the land's sake have preserved for them "America, The Beautiful."

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*Address on "The Program of the Federal Government for the Purchase and Use of Submarginal Land" delivered by C. F. Clayton, Principal Agricultural Economist, Land Policy Section, Division of Program Planning, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, at the Fifteenth Annual Conference, International Association of Agricultural Missions, Union Theological Seminary, New York, New York, March 15, 1935.